

EVENT

Dinner Dialogue
Climate
Energy

The Global Oil Peak and Climate Change - Implications for Growth in Germany

The implications of rising oil prices and the effects of climate change for growth in Germany were the topic of the Dinner Dialogue in honour of Dennis Meadows, co-author of "Limits To Growth". The 30 year update of the 1972 best seller has been the starting point for the discussion taking place in Berlin on 3 April 2006.

Dennis Meadows has been director of three university research institutes at MIT, Dartmouth College, and the University of New Hampshire. His "Limits To Growth" rocketed him to international renown in 1972. In addition to his scientific work, he has been a corporate board member and consultant for government, industry and non-profit groups in numerous countries. He currently serves as President of the [Balaton Group](#) [1], a network of ca. 300 professionals in over 30 nations involved in systems science, public policy and sustainable development.

Dennis Meadows opened the Dialogue with a short anecdote how he, trained as an engineer, became a systems thinker. A long stay in India with an empty desk offered him the possibility to participate in the [Club of Rome](#) [2] research project. Furthermore, his foreign experiences broadened his views on the complex relationship of sustainable growth.

According to Dennis Meadows, the perception of environmental problems and economic growth has changed in the last decades. After first denying any limits to growth, in the 1980s potential limits were accepted but not considered severe, as market forces were considered to be the panacea. After a stint in environmental political action in the 1990s, Dennis Meadows stressed his personal concern that although governments have stopped denying the potential effects from global environmental challenges, such as those stemming from global warming, governments are arguing

today that it is too late to take action.

Regarding the limits to growth, Meadows pointed out that it is less a problem of running out of a given resource. Rather, the increasing investments to keep systems like agriculture running will continue to rise. A further example is the energy sector. New technical advances and energy sources are being developed, but the energy payback from this exploration and development is continuously sinking. All of these financial costs constitute, according to Meadows, negative feedback loops upon the greater economy, as seen in numerous countries.

During the subsequent animated discussion, the following issues were addressed:

- Can alternative energy sources, such as ethanol, address the sustainable growth dilemma and further contribute to greater regional wealth? Could Brazil be the Saudi Arabia of the future?
- How can we mitigate Mr. Meadows' projected sketch for negative feedback loops upon the economy?
- What should be our political response to these challenges? After all, we must remember that the climate change studies in the 1980s took over twenty years to eventually result in the implementation of the Kyoto Protocol.
- How does a systems thinker like Dennis Meadows define collapse? In contrast to the European conception of this term, which is a total and complete breakdown, the Anglo-American interpretation is quite different in that a certain and often necessary state of flux against the present system is supported.

In spite of these challenges, Dennis Meadows encouraged dialog participants in his concluding statement, through a quote by Herman Daly, to never give up hope. To take the first step, it is not necessary to know the entire journey. This is certainly the case today, as we don't have any clear idea of how society will actually look in 50 to 100 years. After all, we had no clear predictions prior to the Industrial Revolution how the present time would unfold.

The [Dinner Dialogue](#) [3] is organised by Ecologic and supported by the [Aachen Foundation](#) [4].

Further Links:

- [CV Dennis Meadows](#) [5] [pdf, 38 KB, English]
- Ecologic Project: [Legal implementation of the European directive on emissions trading](#) [6]
- Ecologic Project: [Costs of Climate Change](#) [7]
- Ecologic Project: [Public Acceptance of Renewable Energy](#) [8]
- Ecologic Publication: [Climate Change Policies at the U.S.](#)

[Subnational Level - Evidence and Implications](#) [9]

- Ecologic Project: [Renewable Energy Sources Act - Legal questions](#) [10]
- Ecologic Event Series: [Dinner Dialogue](#) [11]

3 April 2006

Berlin

Dennis Meadows

Speaker

Dennis Meadows

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Berlin, Germany

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Links

[1] <http://nssd.net/references/SDInd/Donella.html>

[2] <http://www.clubofrome.org/>

[3] <https://www.ecologic.eu/modules.php?name=News&file=categories&op=newindex&catid=31&newlang=english>

[4] <http://www.aachener-stiftung.de/cms.php?id=4&lng=english>

[5] https://www.ecologic.eu/download/dinner_dialogue/2006/cv_meadows.pdf

[6] <https://www.ecologic.eu/1488>

[7] <https://www.ecologic.eu/1417>

[8] <https://www.ecologic.eu/1526>

[9] <https://www.ecologic.eu/1609>

[10] <https://www.ecologic.eu/1562>

[11] <https://www.ecologic.eu/modules.php?name=News&file=categories&op=newindex&catid=31&newlang=english>